

RONALD CHILL

A stylized black and white illustration of a traditional Chinese temple or palace building. The structure features a multi-tiered, ornate roof with upturned eaves. The front facade is composed of several vertical pillars supporting the roof. A central entrance is visible, flanked by decorative elements. The entire building is rendered in a simplified, graphic style with bold lines and no shading.

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Bangkok: An Urban Arena
by Ronald C. Hill

A Publication of the
Foreign Mission Board
Southern Baptist Convention

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Nashville, Tennessee

5136-18

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This book is the level I for a course
in the subject area of *Missions* of the
Church Study Course

Dewey Decimal Classification: 266.593
Subject Heading: Missions—Bangkok
Printed in the United States of America

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Religion in Bangkok

Bangkokians are not quite sure that religion is the answer to their needs, but their strong Buddhist background tells them it is. Those from the country remember village life centered around the temple (wat); yet very few of them visit one of the more than three hundred temples in greater Bangkok even once a year. Under the pressure of modern Bangkok life, the temples play less of a social role than they do in the village, and the temple festivals in Bangkok are noisier than upcountry ones, competing as they must with the city's attractions. Even religious observances such as funerals are poorly attended because of transportation difficulties. As a result, many homes have a room set aside for a small Buddhist altar. And in the corner of the compound will be a spirit house where offerings will be made to *Chao Thi* (lord of the place).

Belief in spirits and powerful shrines still comes through even in bustling Bangkok, as anyone seeing the crowds making and paying vows at the popular Indra shrine at the Erawan Hotel corner can verify. This shrine of the Hindu god Indra was placed at the corner of the modern Erawan Hotel compound when some workmen were killed during the construction of the hotel. It has become widely respected by the people of Bangkok as a holy and powerful object inhabited by the god. Drivers in the congested traffic near this, one of the busiest intersections of the city, are often startled to see the driver of a passing car release his steering wheel and raise his hands in a worshipful *wai* toward the shrine. Any night in the year one can observe the people piling leis of flowers on the shrine, lighting joss sticks and bowing in prayer, and offering expensive gifts to the god. Periodically officials gather the valuable objects offered and dispose of them through auction sales. These offerings have provided funds to build several schools in the countryside.

But to the secular, educated Thai city dweller, neither the native Thai solution of spirit protection nor the traditional Buddhist philosophy of quiet retreat seems sufficient. However, he may still observe Brahmanic taboos such as not cutting hair on Wednesday (most barber shops are still closed on that day) or consult an astrologer on important occasions. Astrology still retains its ancient influence and is used to determine auspicious dates for major undertakings. Horoscopes are cast by Brahman or professional astrologers—even

Buddhist monks, though their dabbling in astrology is frowned upon by many strict Buddhists. People use horoscopes [to decide] which day and hour to embark on a trip, buy land, start a business, or open a shop. Also, before their marriage people consult an astrologer to determine the suitability of the union and the day and hour for the ceremony. But these are superficial rites that have no profound meaning to those who observe them.

The Muslim community, while significant, attracts few converts from the general population to what is essentially a cultural island in the city. Its political recognition is secure because of the importance of the four Muslim provinces in the far South and the sensitivity of the separatist movement advocating either independence or union with Malaysia.

Options people of Bangkok most often consider are secular ones. The young person may dream of going to America. The businessman, Chinese or Thai, seeks the security of a comfortable bank account and sound investments. The student sees education as his first and best pledge of becoming somebody. Many older people say, "What we need is to go back to the old Thai values." The person who lives on the surface of things hopes to find the good life at the movies, in the disco club or in adopting a "with it" lifestyle including jeans and Western popular music.

Few Bangkokians have sought the answer in Jesus Christ. One main reason is that there are only 03 Protestant churches in the metropolis. To get this number, one has to include several small groups and house churches. One American visitor remarked about the lack of visibility of Christianity, "Where are (the) churches?" Some of the eight Catholic churches are in prominent places, but only two or three of the older Protestant churches are on main thoroughfares. There are a few Christian schools in evidence, and the Baptist Student Center is in a prominent spot. But if the average person in Bangkok is to have a chance to know Christ, he must be confronted not by buildings but by a Christian presence in his community and within the social fabric of his daily life.

Evangelical Witness in Bangkok

Although Bangkok has had an evangelical witness for 150 years, missions and missionaries have come in large numbers only since



Missionary William Hitt and receptionist at the Baptist Student Center in Bangkok

World War II. First came the Congregationalists, the Baptists, and the Presbyterians, but only the latter kept up an uninterrupted witness until World War II. Therefore, the Presbyterian work, now absorbed under the interdenominational Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) and related to the World Council of Churches, still has probably the largest membership in the city. An association of Chinese Baptist churches with which American Baptist missionaries have working relationships is a part of the Church of Christ in Thailand as its Twelfth District.

Since World War II, and especially after the closing of the China mainland to missionaries, several missionary organizations have begun work in Bangkok. Other groups besides Southern Baptists to send missionaries were American Baptists, the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (formerly China Inland Mission), the Christian and Missionary Alliance, which had previously worked only in Northeast Thailand (since 1927), and the Church of Christ (U.S.).

Several Pentecostal groups exist in the city, mainly the Finnish Free Foreign Mission, the Scandinavian Pentecostal Mission, the American Assemblies of God, and the Canadian Assemblies of God. Also, the Christian Brethren and the Chinese group often called "Little Flock" have churches; and the Church of Cod of

Anderson, Indiana, has begun work in recent years. Several indigenous and independent Thai churches have been founded and are thriving.

Asian missionary societies are represented by Korean missionaries, independent Japanese missionaries, and Philippine Baptists, whose home churches in the Philippines grew out of the work of the Association of Baptists for World Evangelization.

The Seventh Day Adventists, who had established churches and a hospital before the war, expanded both medical and church development work after 1945. The Jehovah's Witnesses have worked in Bangkok for many years. The Children of God sent a few workers in the late 1970s, and the Mormons, or Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, have sent scores of their young "elders," two by two, going door to door through the residential areas.

Several churches serve primarily the foreign population. An estimated fifty thousand English-speaking people live in Bangkok. English-language churches include Anglican Christ Church, Evangelical Church (Christian Missionary Alliance), International Church (related to the Church of Christ in Thailand), and Calvary Baptist Church. Regular worship services are available for Japanese, Koreans, and Germans. Roman Catholics also have services in English and Filipino.

A number of parachurch organizations have work in Bangkok, the Bible Society of Thailand has printed Bibles for all groups for many years. After World War II the Far East Broadcasting Company, Child Evangelism, Campus Crusade for Christ, World Vision, Christian Literature Crusade, and Youth for Christ arrived.

The Religious Affairs Department of the Thai government gives official recognition to religious bodies. Among Christian groups it recognizes are the Catholic Church; the Church of Christ in Thailand, which includes now the work of several denominations; and the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand, which has in its membership most of the other mission organizations, some church bodies, and individual congregations. In 1977 recognition was given to the Baptist Church Foundation of Southern Baptists, the first single denomination to receive such status. Since then, the Seventh Day Adventist Church of Thailand has also been recognized.

Baptists in Bangkok

Baptists have known Bangkok since the city was very young. It was barely 50 years old when Taylor and Eliza Grew Jones arrived in 1833. These first Baptist missionaries, sent out by the old Triennial Convention, transferred to Siam from Adoniram Judson's band of workers in Burma. The mission there had answered an appeal by Karl Gutzlaff and David Abeel, the first missionaries to Thailand, who were having to leave because of ill health. Two years later William and Matilda Coman Dean joined the Joneses, Jones's efforts among the Thai for many years did not result in a church, but he left as his monument in Thailand the completed Thai New Testament, which Gutzlaff had begun. Some said Jones preached more eloquently in Thai than he did in English. He is buried in Bangkok's Protestant cemetery.

While Baptists established no church among the Thai, in 1837 Dean led in the organization among the Chinese of the first Protestant church in Siam, indeed the first in the Far East. It has continued through the years and is stronger than ever today as the Maitri Chit Baptist Church. It is sometimes called Swatow Baptist Church because its members speak that Chinese dialect.

Several Baptist missionaries served in Bangkok through the years, including J. L. Shuck, the first Southern Baptist missionary to China, and his wife, Henrietta. Siam was considered the back door to China, which was slow to open its doors to foreign missionaries. Shuck spent a short time in Bangkok before going on to Hong Kong. Later, he and Dean, with their wives, shared a house in Macao, and the two young wives are buried side by side in Happy Valley Cemetery in Hong Kong. Later still, after the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845, Shuck, a Southerner, went to Canton to begin Southern Baptist work; and Dean went to Swatow to begin Northern (now American) Baptist work. Baptist missionary work was discontinued in Bangkok in 1893, but Baptist missionaries from Swatow visited the continuing Chinese work from time to time.

With the Communist takeover of China and the inability of missionaries to continue working in that country. Baptist missionaries again returned to Bangkok. Southern Baptists returned in 1949 and American Baptists in 1952. American Baptists came with the pur-

pose of working with the Chinese Baptist churches and with churches among the Karen tribe in North Thailand, which had been started by Karen tribal missionaries from Burma years before. American Baptists now are a part of the Thailand Baptist Missionary Fellowship, which also includes Australian, Swedish, and German missionaries. They cooperate with the ecumenical Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT).

Southern Baptists came to start new work. The first 13 members of the Thailand Baptist Mission were former China missionaries. It is not surprising, therefore, that they began work among the Chinese. Bangkok Baptist Church was organized September 16, 1951, with 15 members and Deaver Lawton and Rudolph Russell as co-pastors. Services were held in both English and Chinese. Besides the missionaries, the membership included three Chinese, two Indians, and two Americans who worked with the United States government. In 1952 the name was changed to Grace Baptist Church, and the church was moved to a large building on Dinso Road near the Democracy Monument. Glenn Morris began what was to be a long association with Grace, helping it to grow to maturity and call a national pastor. Two chapels to reach the Chinese were opened, one in Bean Curd Alley behind Hoi Thien Lao restaurant and one at Rong Liang Dek.

Very early, Southern Baptist missionaries realized that they would have to work in the Thai language if they were going to reach the mainstream of the Thailand population. Frances Hudgins and Mary Gould began studying Thai and started a fellowship with Thai students in their home. With the coming of Rose and Harold Reeves, first missionaries appointed specifically for Thailand, a Thai Sunday School was begun, and English services of Grace Baptist Church were translated into Thai. In 1953 a Baptist student center was opened across from the National Stadium by the Reeveses. On that site in November of the same year, Immanuel Baptist Church was organized with 19 members, the first church begun among the Thais by Southern Baptists. Later the English services of Immanuel were moved to a rented site on Ploenchit Road, and in time Calvary Baptist Church was organized to minister to the English-speaking population of Bangkok.

From these early beginnings have come many churches and

chapels, the centerpiece of Southern Baptists' effort in Bangkok. Besides Grace, two other churches, New Hope and Antioch, were begun in the Chinese language; and the members are almost exclusively Chinese. However, like most ethnic Chinese churches in the city, they have come to use the Thai language more and more in their services. New Hope has used teaching English as its main method of winning new people, thereby winning young people who have grown up, married, and with their families become the heart of the church. Antioch attracts mainly young people with an intensive program of Bible classes, home prayer meetings, and youth fellowship times. Peace Baptist Church, a Thai church which has attracted young people through English lessons, has developed into a strong church. Each new believer spends time in intensive discipleship, and the church has produced several outstanding leaders for Baptist work and Christian work in general.

Prakanong Baptist Church has also attracted young people, many of them university students. Bangna Baptist Church is a small, struggling church strategically located in a rapidly developing industrial area where there are no other churches of any kind. It should have a bright future if the members seize the opportunity. Promise Baptist Church is located in an industrial suburb. Through his contacts with Chinese factory owners in the area, the pastor has helped many new arrivals in the city to find jobs, even training some of them in the skills needed. He has been able to lead some of these to Christ.

Thonburi Baptist Church was for a long time Baptists' only organized witness west of the Chao Phya River. It has a strong nucleus of members who have shown themselves to be concerned about outreach into neighborhoods around their church. Well taught in Bible knowledge by their former pastor, Bommaphanthasri, they are now beginning neighborhood worship groups in areas near the church. Ratburana Baptist Chapel is one. Through its ministry several handicapped people have been won to Christ and church membership. These members of society who often are socially rejected have responded to the demonstration of love by members of this church, Saphan Sam (literally, Third Bridge) Chapel is located in the vast Yannawa District in the curve of the Chao Phya. After many years it is still a struggling work. Although several gifted



A seminary graduate, Ahroon, who is a strong church leader at Thonburi Baptist Church

young people have been won there, they have drilled into other churches to make their contribution.

There are only two Baptist churches in North Bangkok, an area almost untouched by Christian witness. Canaan Baptist Church was started by an American serviceman, Frank Bell. Long subsidized by Calvary Baptist Church, it finally has become self-supporting and has even provided its own place of worship by obtaining a \$25,000 loan from the Baptist Church Loan Fund. This fund was set up with Lottie Moon Christmas Offering funds from the Foreign Mission Board and is administered by the Baptist Church Foundation, a board composed of national leaders and missionaries. Canaan Baptist Church, with a pastor who is a capable preacher and several responsible laymen, maintains an effective witness.

Saphan Mai (New Bridge) Baptist Church is located near Bangkok's Don Muang Airport. Begun by members of Maitri Chit Baptist Church, it elected to join the Thailand Baptist Churches Association rather than the Chinese Baptist District of the Church of Christ in Thailand. This church, although it uses Thai and considers itself a Thai church, is mostly made up of members who are ethnically Chinese.

In addition to the 14 churches related to Southern Baptist work in Bangkok, another 10 Baptist churches and chapels are members of the Twelfth District (Baptist) of the Church of Christ in Thailand. These churches have grown out of the home missionary efforts of Maitri Chit Church and the cooperation of American Baptist missionaries. Most of this growth has come since 1952. The Twelfth District, though a part of the Church of Christ in Thailand, which is Presbyterian in organization, actually functions very much like a Baptist association. It is staunchly Baptist in polity and doctrine. The members of this "association" are Maitri Chit Baptist Church, Sacred Light Baptist Church, Ruam Chit Baptist Church, Fellowship Church, Prachakom Church, Bethel Church, Trok Chan Chapel, Talat Plu Chapel, Tanon Tok Center, and Tak Sin Chapel. Together the Baptist churches of the Thai association and the Chinese Baptist churches make up one fourth of the churches of metropolitan Bangkok. Baptists have heavy investments spiritually and great promise strategically in the battle for the hearts of the people of Bangkok.

The Thailand Baptist Convention

During the Easter season of 1976, a significant event in the life of Baptists in Thailand occurred. Messengers from Baptist churches all over the kingdom gathered in Chiangmai to organize the Thailand Baptist Convention. This was not an ordinary coming together of Baptists. The messengers, all Thai citizens, represented churches of four different language groups and four different cultures—Thai, Chinese, Karen, and Lahu. The latter two are tribal groups in the hills of northern Thailand who, like the Chinese, also work with the Thailand Baptist Missionary Fellowship. Baptists of various backgrounds and traditions had felt the need for each other, the strength a united witness by Baptists in Thailand would bring. Both Baptist mission groups have encouraged the young and promising convention and cooperated with it. The effective, day-to-day working relationship of each missionary organization has continued to be with the associations of churches of each ethnic group, but the convention has provided a way for Baptists of all groups to cooperate on a national level.

In 1980 there were approximately 12,000 Baptists of all four

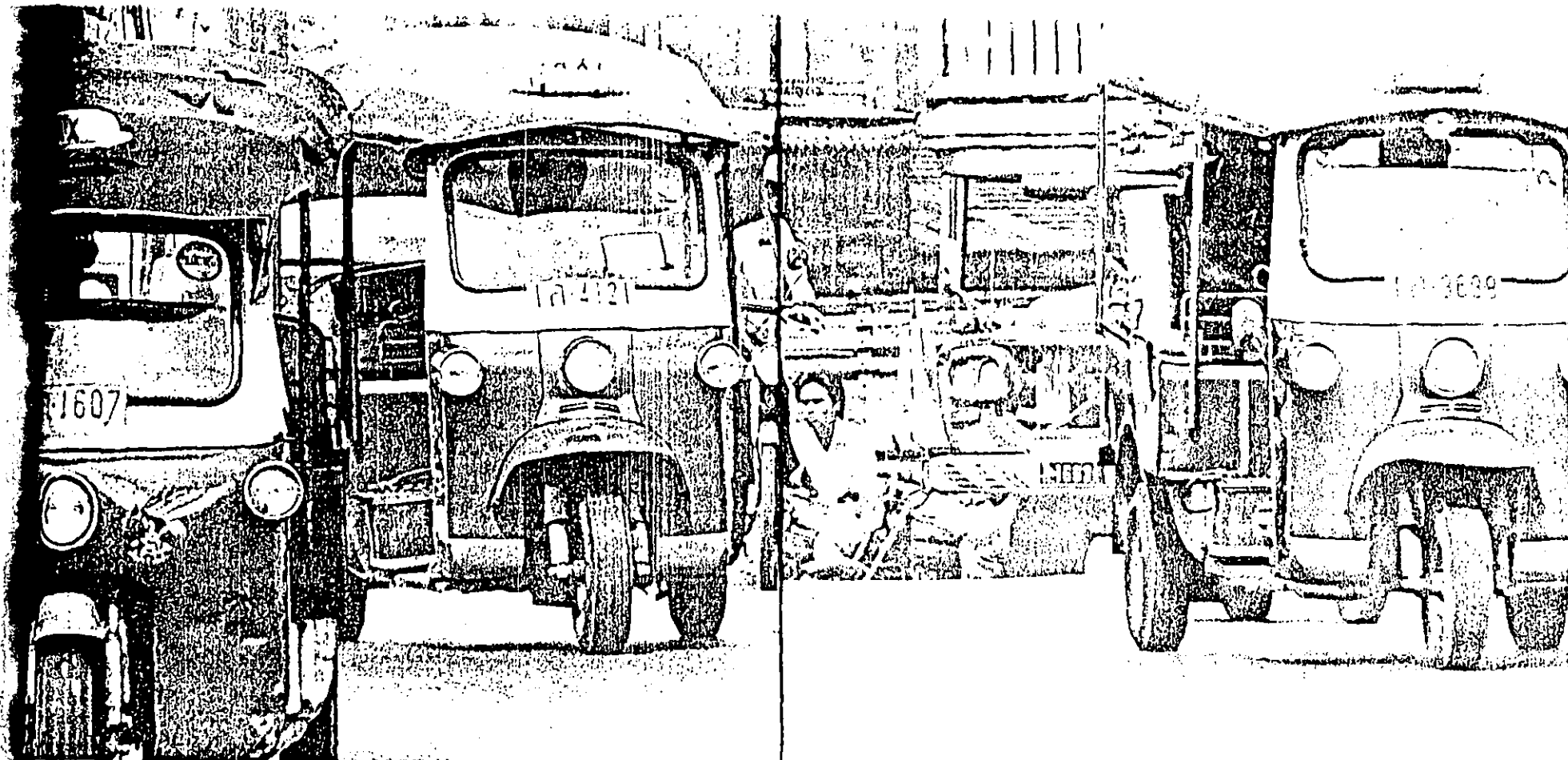
ethnic communities in Thailand. Although cooperation has been confined to biennial conventions and occasional visits back and forth for the two tribal groups, the Chinese and Thai churches in Bangkok have frequently worked together in several ways. They have had city-wide evangelistic campaigns, youth meetings, and women's meetings. The potential is there for a coordinated and mutually beneficial outreach in evangelism and church planting.

southern-Baptist outreach

In the very beginning Southern Baptist missionaries began work in their homes. These fellowships became churches, such as Grace Baptist Church. Soon, however, the approach changed to a program of English-teaching, youth meetings, Bible classes, and Sunday Schools for children that met in a rented shop-house or a dwelling. More often than not, the missionary worked with a national co-worker, hired by the mission in the beginning, later supported by the budget of the newly gathered group subsidized by mission funds. The subsidy plan ran eight to ten years or longer on a gradually diminishing scale, according to the strength of the group. For a time the new work was called a "chapel"—mission field equivalent of a "mission" in the United States. When it was strong enough, it organized as an independent church, its subsidy continuing. Sometimes the subsidy continued even longer, until the church became self-supporting.

After much prayer and study, the mission decided in 1971 to discontinue financial aid to pastors and churches. Observation had taught that such aid had often served only to delay the time when the members felt responsibility for the support of the church. Also, some churches that started without aid seemed to mature more quickly. Discontinuance of aid was a traumatic experience for the churches concerned, but after a time of struggle, eventually all of them came to be self-supporting. Most of the existing Bangkok churches were begun with this approach.

In addition to planting new churches, which is the backbone of their work, Southern Baptists have also used various specialized approaches that have become organized as offices or institutions. Basically there are two kinds of institutions, according to the way these entities relate to the total church planting task. The first kind



Samlors or tuk-tuks on a Bangkok street

might be called "support institutions," since they are designed to undergird in some way the life and work of the churches. This category would include the seminary, Baptist Christian Education (which includes publication of literature), Baptist Leadership Training (Theological Education by Extension), the bookstore, and the seaside encampment. Another kind of institutionalized approach is the "outreach institution." These are special programs of ministry

and evangelism that the Thailand churches could not afford and which are not absolutely essential to the life of the churches yet are valid and effective means of extending the Christian witness. The mission projects them with Southern Baptist money as a part of the mission's and the churches' overall objective of giving a Christian witness, making disciples, and establishing churches in Thailand. These institutions include the hospital, the student center, and the

mass communications office. Since Bangkok is the central city, m3gfp£4fre-institfctiongl work is located there.

Besides their assigned specialized roles, these institutions have contributed to church planting in the past. Graduates of the seminary have worked with missionaries to start chapels and to grow churches. Missionary Glenn Morris of the seminary faculty helped get an infant Grace Baptist Church on its feet, as mentioned earlier. Harold Reeves, who began radio and television work, led in the founding of Immanuel and Thonburi churches. Benton Williams, while he was student center director, worked with Thai preachers in starting Prakanong and Bangna churches. Immanuel was started in the Baptist Student Center and drew many members from its program in early days. In addition, many of the institutions have won people to Christ who have found their way into the churches as active members.

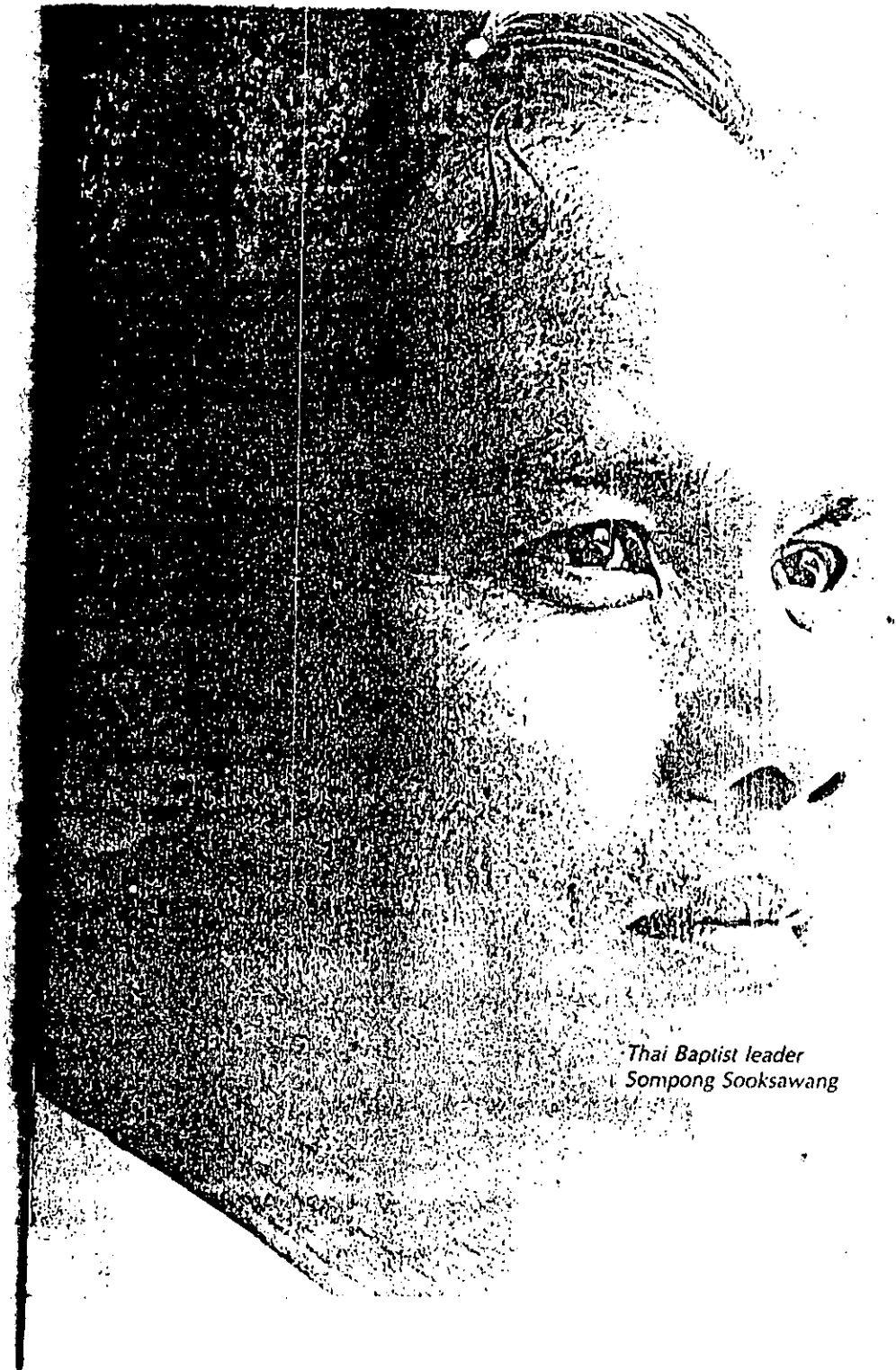
Southern Baptists have a capable team of nationals and missionaries in Bangkok. Just as "Paul and his companions," an "apostolic team" of people with different gifts and backgrounds, joined in one common purpose and plan to evangelize cities around the Aegean Sea, a missionary task force can do the same today. And just as Paul's team included locally won disciples like Epaphras (Col. 1:7; 4:12), the effective group of workers in these times of nationalism certainly must include nationals. Baptists are grateful for the strong group of leaders God has raised up in Bangkok. Other denominations and mission organizations have remarked about the outstanding Baptist leaders who are called upon for wider responsibilities in the Christian community.

History has shown that Baptists and Bangkok have interlocked destinies. Back when Bangkok was young, God brought Baptists with a burden for the royal city among the first wave of missionaries. The Chinese Baptists maintained a witness for almost a century and a half, even when the missionaries moved on to the greater appeal of China's millions. In the middle of the twentieth century, God again brought Baptist missionaries to the capital of Thailand, just when the metropolis of a million people was ready to explode into a megalopolis of five million. Thirty years of new Baptist growth have produced 24 churches and at least a solid beginning of a Baptist movement in the City of Angels. But one is constrained to

cry as Andrew did about the five loaves and two fishes, "What are they among so many?"

Nevertheless, Baptists are a significant part of the Christian focus in Bangkok and are strategically placed to make a unique input on the city in the last two decades of the century. Perhaps they have come to the kingdom for such a time as this. They are not so naive as to think the task is theirs alone. Thank God for others who believe the historical Christian faith and have heard God's call to labor in Bangkok. Much will depend on them. But Baptists cannot escape their own rendezvous with Bangkok. As believers in the Lord's command to disciple all the nations who have been placed by him in this part of the battle line, they must give account of their stewardship.

Bangkok—Krung Thef>—is a city of people, not angels. Stand with Jesus overlooking the city and weep. See that leper full of sores? See that student without a purpose? See that street vendor wondering how he can feed his family? See that intellectual who is bored with life? See that child abandoned by its mother? See that new arrival confused and without a job? Each one is looking for someone who cares. Baptists say they care. But do they have a way to help these who hurt? Do they have a plan to do something that counts? Do they have a strategy for the city of Bangkok?



*Thai Baptist leader
Sompong Sooksawang*

3. In Search of a Strategy

an 1975 Bangkok was a city under a shadow. Countries were falling like dominoes all over Southeast Asia, altering the political landscape in every direction. In April the ruthless Pol Pot regime took over Cambodia, and the North Vietnamese conquered Saigon and the South. In July came the final takeover in Laos by a Communist, Vietnamese-Sponsored regime. American forces not only left South Vietnam and Cambodia but soon were asked to leave their bases in Thailand by a Thai government rapidly scrambling to readjust its relations with new communist neighbors.

Because many people thought the Vietnamese would be in Bangkok any day, businessmen were madly trying to get funds safely out of Thailand to Hong Kong or Zurich. A number of missionaries, seeing what had happened to colleagues serving in nearby countries, were disheartened, certain they would have to leave Thailand before the year's end.

But missionaries who had been in Thailand a long time had a different perspective. In a country that allowed freedom of religion, they had experienced the frustration of witnessing to a warm and open people who simply felt little need for God and were unusually resistant to the gospel. Christians, counting Roman Catholics, made up only .6 of 1 percent of the population; Protestants made up less



Missionary Judson Lennon at a planning meeting with Thai Baptists

than a third of that number. Now, in the midst of such troubling events, perhaps the friendly Thais might respond to a heavenly Friend—even to the claims of Christ. That possibility pervaded their thoughts.

Judson Lennon was one of those veteran missionaries. During his 20 years in Thailand, he had worked faithfully and effectively with the 14 churches that had grown out of Southern Baptist work in Bangkok, counseling their pastors, teaching study courses, helping train church members. He believed that planting living, indigenous New Testament churches in their midst **is** God's way of evangelizing any people. Lennon's heart ached to reach out, to find a way to lead the troubled Thai people.

Thai Baptist leaders had the same yearning to see Thais turn to Christ. Looking out over Bangkok, the pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church often wept inside, just as Jesus wept over Jerusalem. But Pastor Boonkrong Pitakanon also began to notice the effect of the

times on Bangkokians. From many friends in government and from former classmates came questions about the meaning of life, what is sure when everything in the country is crumbling? They even asked direct questions: Who is this Jesus Christ that you worship? What does he have to offer Thai people?

Pastor Boonkrong had left a strategic and successful position as the first Thai secretary of the Thailand Bible Society to answer God's call to the pastorate. Although he had overseen distribution of 10 million Scripture portions in Buddhist Thailand the last three years of his tenure, he chose the local church as the front line for winning individual Thais to Christ and helping them grow into mature Christians. But he was worried. How could so few Christians confront the whole city with the claims of Christ? How could such a small number of churches make disciples of more people?

Baptist lay people were also searching for answers. Chanin, a member of Immanuel Baptist Church, worked in a factory that made transistors and other parts for electronic devices. He and his wife, Rachanee, who were both keen Christians, had moved into a new housing development in Klong Chan in eastern Bangkok. In the complex were 6,000 homes, a large number owned by young couples who for the first time had moved away from their parents' homes in the inner city and were buying their flats (apartments) on the installment plan.*

Rachanee was hired as manager of one of the sections. With easy access to their new neighbors, how were they to share their faith with the young families living in a strange new world? upwardly mobile on the social ladder and open to new ideas, their neighbors were a real challenge to the young Christian couple. But Immanuel Church was far across the city, and there was no church of any kind in Klong Chan.

Chanin and Rachanee knew of one or two Christian couples and suspected there were others in this area of a half-million people. Could they start a Bible study in their flat? Would someone help them get a new church started in Klong Chan? Should they even

*Note: Only the first name is used in reference to a number of people in this book. Thais probably would use the word *Khun* (Mr., Mrs., Miss) with these names, as Khun Chanin or Khun Rachanee. Similarly, they would use *Achit* (pastor or teacher) with a pastor's first name, as Acharn Boonkrong.

think of deserting Immanuel Church with its less than 150 members? But would people in Klong Chan, even if they became interested in the gospel, be willing to pay the bus fare and take the time necessary to go with them to church every Sunday?

Chatchawan and Chalermsee were searching too. They did not know what they wanted. They were bored with life. Both teachers, he had come from the northeast and she from the south of Thailand some years before. They lived in a rented frame house in a neighborhood not far from Thonburi Baptist Church, west of the river in Thonburi. Though they had read tracts, had seen movies like *The Ten Commandments* and *Sen Hur*, and had even heard some Christian radio programs, they had never known a Christian as a personal friend. They certainly did not think their search would be satisfied by a *farangs* religion (*farang* means Westerner, European, or member of the Caucasian race).

The Theology of Planning

Feeling a need to come to grips with the opportunities of the times, the Thailand Baptist Mission (organization of Southern Baptist missionaries serving in Thailand) decided to reexamine their goals. Why are we here? What are our plans? Do we have a strategy that will accomplish our agreed purpose: winning as many Thai people to Jesus as possible and gathering them into infinitely reproducing New Testament churches?

The missionaries knew the ultimate success of the work depended wholly on the movement of the Holy spirit. That had been the unvarying pattern in missions throughout history and all the way back to Pentecost. They themselves had experienced an outpouring of the spirit in their 1971 meeting, when for days they had interrupted the order of business to get things right with God and with one another. That spiritual dynamic had continued in their fellowship, but the question in 1975 was *how to harness that power to the task at hand*.

The mission went into a self-study in depth. Were they accomplishing what each had originally felt called by God to do in Thailand? Were they reaping the potential in the new climate of responsiveness among Thai people? Or was it business as usual?

At the suggestion of R. Keith Parks, then area secretary for South-



Missionary Mary Beckham (Mrs. William) teaching lintfish

east Asia, who became president of the Foreign Mission Board in 1980, the mission invited missionaries Jim Slack of the Philippines and William McElrath of Indonesia to come as outside "evaluators." Through talks with missionaries, national leaders, and outside people, these two men prepared a report for the mission in annual session. From it came a series of decisions and commitments solemnly taken about a new direction for Baptist work in Thailand. This direction was a pledge to focus on the planting of as many churches as possible and to bend every resource—missionaries, budgets, institutions, and programs to this one overriding goal.

Now, how to implement these decisions? Ten frogs on a log. One decides to jump off. How many are left? The answer is ten because the frog did not jump. He just decided to.

How were they to jump? Realization came that planning was needed. As the missionaries got into the "theology of planning," they understood God as a God of purposes and plans. He has plans

and he makes them known in the Bible. He reveals what he is doing and where he is going. Study of the Word of God teaches his ultimate purposes. *Prayer* and the Holy spirit's leading show God's plans for an immediate situation. God has chosen to include the human race in his plans and has given free will to all people. This means the opportunity to choose to cooperate with him in accomplishing his purposes.

On the other hand, as God gives humankind the creative capacity for anticipating needs, marshalling resources and possibilities, and planning ahead to accomplish ends, the freedom God allows can end in disobedience. Rather than having a priority of coinciding with the expressed will of God as his basis of planning, man can follow his own desires and preferences.

Yet this important truth stands: planning dependent on God's instructions in the Bible and on his guidance through prayer and the Holy Spirit is not "getting in the way of the Holy Spirit" and "working against God." The opposite is true, *when we fail to plan, we frustrate what the Holy Spirit is trying to do through us.*

New Ideas and Old Principles

Late in 1975 came a spark that kindled all the tinder of Baptists' search for a way to evangelize Bangkok. At the mission's Thanksgiving retreat, Ralph Neighbour shared his vision for reaching Singapore and outlined his developing urban strategy for that city, whose Baptist base was similar in size to that of Bangkok.

Neighbour, with years of experience in urban evangelism in the United States, was serving as a missionary associate in Singapore. He had been invited there by the missionaries and churches to develop a plan to multiply churches in the high-rise apartment blocks of that city of 2.25 million people.

After he spoke, four missionaries from Bangkok asked to meet with him to talk about his plan. They were Judson Lennon; Bill Beckham, an East Texas pastor who had recently been appointed for urban evangelism in Bangkok; Bill Smith, another new missionary appointed for on-campus student evangelism on Bangkok's university campuses; and the author of this book, Ronald Hill, mission administrator for Thailand. The five of us met in the kitchen of one of the cabins at the Baptist encampment. Hearts warmed and

eyes glowed as we shared a vision of confronting the whole city of Bangkok with Jesus Christ.

When someone mentioned the goal of planting a church in every one of the more than one thousand neighborhoods of the city, Neighbour said, "Singapore's plan won't do for Bangkok. The principles should work, but you will have to find God's plan for Bangkok, based on the principles but applied to the specific situation." We knew some hard work lay ahead, but the "strategy to find a strategy" had begun.

Two weeks later, four of us met again in the kitchen of that same cabin, just to pray and search the Word of God for *his* plan for Bangkok. We needed "a theology from which to develop a method." What was a church in the New Testament sense? really essential elements? How did the apostles start a church? How did it grow? How did Paul and his apostolic team evangelize the cities around the shores of the eastern Mediterranean? What about "the church in your house"? As we put these questions to the Scriptures and to each other, the Holy Spirit strangely stirred our hearts and excitement grew.

Building on Ralph Neighbour's idea, we began to think through the whole evangelistic task from start to finish. We tried to break it down into its constituent parts and anticipate everything that had to be done from contacting people who have little or no knowledge of the gospel to building up mature Christians and seeing them committed to each other in warm spiritual fellowships. We searched the Bible to see how God (and his messengers) prepared a people to hear and understand and respond to Christ. We came to see that the entire Old Testament, John the Baptist's movement, and the wide proclamation ministry of Jesus were a part of this preparation. We began to use the word climatize for this phase.

How did Jesus get into the lives of people? We saw his personalized ministry of caring for the poor, preaching the good news to them, and his deeds of love and mercy in healing their hurts and diseases. We had already learned through work begun in 1975 with Indochinese refugees that ministry to human hurt was the twin of evangelism, not something divorced from it. When done personally and naturally out of Christian love, just because the need is there, it often results naturally in beautiful opportunities for evangelism,

Ministry must have a part in the strategy.

How did Jesus win people? We saw both his broad proclamation of the good news and his one-by-one encounters as well. How did he "build his church"? We saw him spending *time* to disciple—to teach and to train that little band of followers so that they could in turn teach others. Looking back at the ministry of Paul and his companions, we saw the importance of following family and friendship lines, of the dynamics of small groups in "the church in your house," of a city-wide strategy like the one Paul used at Ephesus, and of working intensively with a closely knit team (we counted almost 30 people who worked closely with Paul at one time or another).

Coming away from that mountaintop weekend, we wanted to share our vision with the Thai Baptists, who were already seeking a way to penetrate Bangkok and looking to missionaries to start something. Recalling the words of Pastor John Chang in Singapore, who once defined a missionary as "somebody who has a vision and can make me see it," we began to meet weekly to clarify that vision before sharing it with our Thai brothers.

Early on, we were led to enter in 1966 a work covenant that represented a deep commitment to each other. Bill Beckham put it in written form.

1. *Prayer Covenant:* We covenant together to pray for our work and for each other. "This is above our head but under his feet."
2. *Priority Covenant:* We covenant together to follow these priorities in all that we do: to make sure each idea or plan is God's; to ascertain each program is for the Thai; to see the role of the missionary as equipper. "The leader is best when people *barely* know he exists. Then the people say, 'We did it ourselves.' " Lao Tse, *Book of Tao*, 600 B.C.
3. *Confidentiality Covenant:* We covenant together to work in a spirit of confidentiality concerning all discussion and "brainstormings"; to discuss only completed plans outside our group.
4. *Sharing Covenant:* We covenant to share our thoughts, feelings, and plans in open and frank constructive criticism; to being a "sounding board" for the ideas of the group and to

throw our ideas upon the "sounding board" of the group.

5. *Support Covenant:* We covenant together to support each other and to support the completed plans with our prayers, energies, and commitments. In our special field of service, we will attempt to make the plans work in practice as well as in theory.
6. *Optimism Covenant:* We covenant together to approach our task with a positive optimism which springs from the awareness of God's power and purpose at work in Thailand.
7. *Preparation Covenant:* We covenant together that we will be prepared for every meeting and will fulfill whatever assignments are given by the group.
8. *Creativity Covenant:* We covenant together to allow the Holy Spirit to awaken us and use us creatively.
9. *Courage-to-Fail Covenant:* We covenant together in a willingness to submit plans and ideas to the possibility of failure, realizing that God can teach us through specific failures so that his general plan might succeed.
10. *Urgency Covenant:* We covenant together to be filled with an awareness of the urgency of our task, but never to allow panic to circumvent necessary planning and preparation.

At that early stage, we had come to the conviction that any pattern for outreach in Bangkok had to be built on the following principles:

1. It must be biblical.
2. It must be truly Thai.
3. It must have the whole city in view but focus on neighborhoods.
4. It must be done as a team (body of Christ; Paul's team).
5. It must break down the whole evangelistic/church planting task into its component parts.
6. It must start with the existing church base.
7. It must be based on research (sociological, anthropological, communications, religious).
8. It must be willing to experiment and fail.
9. It must be God's plan—saturated in prayer and led by the Spirit.
10. It must be simple and transferable.

The Thai Way

Moving toward a plan that was truly Thai, we asked the Thailand Baptist Churches Association to appoint four leaders to form a joint team with the four of us. They selected four pastors, Boonkrong Pitakanon, Wan Petchsongkram, Boonma Phantasri, and Sawong Klaisamret. Weekly meetings were held for prayer, Bible study, discussion, and dreaming. We decided to take time to develop a comprehensive plan that would be a whole new way of working together for the future, rather than coming up with a short, intensive campaign that would be over in a year. About mid-1976 Bill Beckham recorded the "foundation principles of evangelism" we were discovering through interaction. "Dynamic rather than static," they were formulated subject to expansion and change. A summary of these principles follows.

1. Outreach in Bangkok must be Thai, a principle dramatized in the political upheaval of Southeast Asia. God can use political events to remind us that all we will leave behind in Thailand is Thai Christians.

2. Christian discipleship is necessary for effective outreach. It is not methods of witnessing that we first need to teach. We need to teach discipleship—obedience and dependence and relationship to Christ alone.

3. God desires to use the existing churches in Bangkok. These churches should become "Base Churches" to reach out to the neighborhoods around them and across the city.

4. An understanding of Thais in Bangkok is important to outreach. It was decided that a sociological study could explore the factors and processes at work in Bangkok and the Thais who live there.

5. We must identify people in the homogeneous neighborhood. . . . "zeroing in" on the target neighborhoods instead of scattering all over the city. We can bless the city when we see the people.

6. Pre-evangelism is necessary to reach people effectively. The first phase of our strategy into a neighborhood will be to climatize that neighborhood . . . through every type of media which the Thai can use . . . so the Holy Spirit can draw them to a point of decision. Our verbal witness does not mean they hear.

7. People touched with friendship ministry are more open to the gospel. It may be that the compassion and love that Jesus expressed in personal ministry was more important to the people than the miracles he performed. A Thai will find it hard to believe that God left heaven to come to earth to help him if Christians are not willing to leave their churches to come to their neighborhoods and help them. Ministry may be the one necessary link with Thai Buddhists that can convince them of the reality of a personal God who loves.

8. Decision-directed Bible study is an effective method of winning the receptive. It should be recognized that Bible study is not the first step, however. Effective Bible study should come when people are prepared and when they recognize their teachers as their friends also.

9. New member discipleship is one of the most important tasks of the church. "Go into the world and make disciples." The New Testament reveals discipleship training in two areas—intensive discipleship training in knowledge of the Bible, and intensive discipleship training in relationship to mature Christians.

10. God will gather his church out of disciplined Christians. The churches will not all look alike or act alike or come from the same economic or educational level but will be the caring, loving, ministering, witnessing, learning body of Christ.

The rest of 1976 was given to applying these principles to the Thai situation. A Thai sociologist was commissioned to do an in-depth study of Bangkok, an audience research survey of the felt needs of the Thai people and their understanding of the gospel was completed later, and the 1970 "Urban Survey of Southeast Asia" by Francis M. Dube of Golden Gate Seminary was brought out and restudied.

Briefings of the vision we were seeing and the plans developing were held for the Association Executive Committee, the pastors, the Central Station (Southern Baptist missionaries who live in greater Bangkok), and the Executive Committee of the Thailand Baptist Mission. All these groups were willing to let what was now the Bangkok Urban Strategy team (BUS) pursue their search for a plan, and thus the strategy was given a certain legitimacy. In September, a multimedia presentation of the challenge of Bangkok,



Missionary William Smith with a university student

the present Baptist work (the churches saw themselves in it), and the biblical commission to reach the masses was presented to over 400 people from the churches. This motion picture and slide production was called "A Cry from the People."

At the presentation, over 60 church members volunteered to join study groups, each group focusing on some facet of the strategy. These guided studies gave opportunity for the input of Thai ideas throughout the program. One group worked at designing the logo to

be used as an identifying symbol. Another focused on how to "climatize" a neighborhood. Another group determined the kind of personal ministries that could be used, ministries Thai churches could afford and which would meet neighborhood needs. Yet another group spent several weeks developing the Bible study to be used in the strategy. It was to be composed of 13 lessons and based on the experiences of Thai Christians in coming to believe in Christ—the problems they encountered and what they needed to know to decide for Christ.

Still another group of pastors and church members worked on the discipleship materials for new Christians. As a beginning they used the three affirmations Professor Cal Guy of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary had suggested in Bangladesh: Jesus is my lord; the Bible is my book; the church is my family. To these three, seven other chapters were added, so that the ten-week study looked as follows: Jesus Is My Lord; Satan Is My Enemy; The Bible Is My Book; My former Belief Is My Unique Problem; Prayer Is My Communication with God; The Church Is My Family; The New Birth Is My Experience; My Life Is an Instrument of God; The Holy Spirit Is My Helper; Heaven Is My Home.

No wonder we came to call 1976 "the year of discovery." We began then to see moving toward fulfillment the longings of the pastor, the older and newer missionary, the church member, and even the searching non-Christian. We saw God's timing in bringing together the team of missionaries under the leadership of Judson Lennon and the joint team with key Thai leaders. We saw the outlines of a strategy developing and the involvement of several members of the churches in making it indigenous. Still ahead was the testing of that plan in the churches and in the neighborhoods.

Focus: Metro-Asia

Before we leave the search for a strategy, let us look for a moment at a wider, international search of which the Bangkok urban evangelists were a part. As they struggled with overwhelming problems, the Bangkok team, Ralph Neighbour and those working in Singapore's strategy, and others in Manila and Jakarta who were searching for a way to come to grips with their great cities desired to get together and compare notes. The idea began to develop in Idle

1977 and early 1978 for an international conference bringing together Baptists from all over Asia. The purpose was to share among those who were already into programs and perhaps provide inspiration for those desiring to start. The mission administrators of the Southeast Asia missions, meeting with their area director, William R. Wakefield, agreed to hold such a conference in October 1978.

Called "Focus: Metro-Asia," the conference met in the Tondo section of Manila in the Philippines. National leaders and missionaries came together representing cities with a total population of 50 million—the power and culture centers of Asia's two billion people. Limited to 60 participants, the conference was a practicum, with mornings given to lectures and the afternoons used for getting out into the slums, squatter communities, and residential neighborhoods of downtown Manila. Participants learned how to see a community, its life, its communication system, its needs for ministry, its religious climate. Among the speakers were Prospero R. Covar, a Philippine sociologist; Greg Tingson, Philippine Baptist evangelist; Ralph Neighbour, former missionary and pastor in Houston, Texas; Winston Crawley of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board; Don Larson, anthropologist and linguist from Bethel College, St. Paul, Minnesota; and pastors Shuichi Matsumura of Tokyo and Victor Tan of Singapore.

In case studies during the evenings, the beginnings of the Singapore and Bangkok strategies were presented, as well as current urban approaches in other Asian cities. Matsumura told of his church's plan of beginning new churches in suburban Tokyo. Bill Fudge told the exciting story of Baptist church planting in Seoul, resulting in more than 100 churches in two associations at that time with more being organized almost weekly.

Participants were moved to tears of confession and concern on the final day as they looked at the magnitude of the task. Strong bonds of fellowship were forged and promises to pray for each other were solemnly made. National-missionary teams from many cities went back home with a determination to search for a strategy for their part of Metro-Asia. Included among them was a team of nationals and missionaries from Bangkok who had seen a new vision of reaching their city for Christ and were committed to

seeking ways to implement the principles of the Bangkok Urban Strategy.

Back in Bangkok, not everyone shared the Bangkok Urban Strategy (BUS) team's enthusiasm for their vision. Change is always painful, ~~yvyil~~ desired change. Any change in the status quo threatens some people. Some pastors feared that the starting of new church units would drain strength from their churches. Some felt that the traditional chapel-centered approach with subsidy from the mission was the only feasible way to begin new churches. One or two were enthusiastic and opened their churches to the recruiting and training of teams. Most reserved judgment on the new strategy. Some missionaries had considerable reservations about the approach and adopted a wait-and-see attitude. There was some outspoken criticism on the part of pastors and missionaries.

So the members of the BUS group realized that they were going to have to be a remnant for a while. This often is the way God has to work to bring about change. Having sown the seed concepts among the broad Christian community and its leaders, a remnant drew together as a task force to test out the principles, set a model, and gather some leaders who were experienced in the strategy and committed to it, so that the strategy would have the potential of becoming a movement of the spirit among the people of God. It was going to take time, persistence, and patience.

Sanoong Muanpetch
leading a service at Thonburi
Baptist Church



4.

The Strategy in Action

Birth of a Base Church

A good strategy had been worked out based on Scriptural principles. But would it work? The frog has to jump off the log into the pond.

Thonburi Baptist Church was a small church but had many things in its favor as a place to test the plan. The pastor at that time, B00nma Phanthasri, was supportive, and eight or ten members were enthusiastic. Also, a missionary family, Bill and Mary Beckham; were committed to the church full-time, and they supported the plan. Thnnhuri church decided to go allout—to follow the plan from start to finish and try to "set the model." It was the first base church for the plan,

Beckham laid out a 52-week program with these steps: identify, select, survey the target neighborhood, weeks 1—4; climatize the neighborhood, weeks 5-13; personal ministries, weeks 14-23; decision-oriented Bible studies, weeks 24-33; discipling new Christians, weeks 34—43; worshipping group meeting in the neighborhood, weeks 44—52.

The training was done in bite-sized pieces. It was not done all at once in a seminar before the workers had wet their feet in the neighborhood. It was on-the-job training. Each Sunday after morning worship and after everyone had eaten at the corner n00die



Members of Thonburi Baptist Church having lunch before an urban strategy planning meeting

shop, team members gathered at the church at about one o'clock. Varying from 5 to as many as 15, they had training for an hour about the specific assignment they were to carry out that day. "Today we will give our two-minute testimony to at least one person. Let's each one write down his personal experience with Christ, bringing out these points in the outline you see here." Bill did not do the training himself, but he had previously taught the material to the trainees; sanoong Muanpetch, a seminary graduate

and church leader.

After the training and a time of prayer, the team went out in the neighborhood to implement the specific plan. Bill and Mary went along but kept in the background because of the Thai reaction to Christianity as the *farangs* religion. The contacts and visits in the neighborhood finished, they all returned to the church for 45 minutes of evaluation and sharing, to learn further from what had happened. At the close they found themselves in earnest prayer for

this person or that person in the neighborhood to whom they had talked that day. The team members were witnessing, learning, having fellowship, as well as being disciplined themselves through the whole experience.

The group from Thonburi Church completed the strategy once, then divided and went into two more neighborhoods. More recently, they have surveyed two additional neighborhoods and have initiated the program in them also. Of the nine won to Christ in the first neighborhood, three or four were on the teams for the new outreach. Chatchawan and his wife, Chalermsee, the searching teachers of Chapter 3, were among them. Though not attracted at first by the content of the gospel and sharing the typical Thai antipathy to Jesus Christ, they were won by personal friendship with Christians. They grew rapidly in their discipleship, and they have become strong leaders in the base church, with Chatchawan ably sharing preaching duties. He also serves as a team leader in the outreach to new neighborhoods. They are among the some 20 leaders who have entered the Bangkok Urban Strategy (BUS) monthly training program, and Chatchawan serves on the city-wide coordinating committee for BUS. The training program is designed to give systematic training for a new kind of "implementing" leader for the strategy. They will continue as "tentmakers" in their present occupations. They are the cream that is rising to the top, coming up through the strategy and knowing it from the inside.

Other Base Churches

Judson Lennon has become a key person in the Baptist strategy to reach Bangkok. Not only is he the leader of the team of five missionaries who are working full-time in BUS, but he has also led in implementing the plan in several neighborhoods. He testifies that the new plan has revolutionized his missionary service and given him a handle on enabling Thai churches to reach their communities and to start new groups of Christians in unchurched communities. Sometimes older missionaries have a hard time accepting the suggestions of new missionaries, but Judson has not felt threatened by the ideas of the newer members of the BUS team. At the same time, his steady and experienced hand has given the team stability as it

searched for ways and means to expand church-planting throughout Bangkok. His spirit is one of the reasons it has been a team strategy. He has also taught the new approach in classes on church growth at the Thailand Baptist Theological Seminary and has included seminary students on neighborhood teams with whom he has worked. Lennon's major application of the plan has been through two younger churches, Saphan Mai Baptist Church and Prachakom Baptist Church. He and his wife, Harriett, have spent more than a year enabling teams in these two churches.

Saphan Mai Church has been revitalized by its involvement with BUS. A relatively new church with a mostly young membership, it has reoriented its entire program around the discipling of members, training of teams, and reaching out to the community—indeed, around Urban Strategy. Their first team surveyed a community near the church, took it as their target neighborhood, and began climatizing it by visiting, being seen in the neighborhood wearing the BUS logo, distributing calendars with the logo (the people who care) on it to every home, giving out tracts and Scripture portions, getting interested people involved in the Baptist Bible correspondence course, and having nights of film evangelism. As they identified needs and interests in the neighborhoods, they began personal ministries, evangelistic Bible studies, and so on. In general they followed the 52-week program Thonburi Church used.

Early on, they realized that their team had too many members for one neighborhood. So they divided into two teams, and the second team began work in another neighborhood near the church. Not long afterward, a third team was formed. Led by Pohpon, who works full-time in the BUS office, they began an outreach several miles from Saphan Mai Church at Soi Anek, which is near Pohpon's parents' home. Several have accepted Christ, and worship services have begun in a home there. Those who have become Christians in the other two neighborhoods attend services at the base church.

Prachakom (Community) Church grew out of a community center started by American Baptist missionaries in the Din Daeng area of Bangkok. It is the only Thai-language church in the Twelfth District (Chinese Baptist) of the CCT. It is surrounded by numbers of government apartment buildings, each five stories high and housing scores of families in what are unfamiliar circumstances for Thai people.

They have always favored single-family dwellings, and problems abound when they are stacked on top of each other in crowded conditions.

For several years Prachakom church had been without a pastor but during that time developed several strong lay leaders. Among them is Sompong, who has a responsible government job with an army ordinance factory. Keen Bible student and warm-hearted witness, he has been attending night classes on the bachelor of divinity level at the Thailand Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the leader of Prachakom's BUS team.

This team began work at one, then another, of the government apartment houses. Many children but few adults responded. Perhaps the key to the apartment house situation has not yet been found.

The team later took as their target neighborhood a slum area with no church in the Huay Kwang section of Bangkok, which immediately borders Din Daeng. The Lennons served as enablers to the team through the survey, climatizing, ministry, Bible study, and discipleship phases of the BUS plan. In late 1980 several had come to Christ and a regular weekly worship group had been established in the home of Pairat, a Baptist layman from another church who had moved into the area.

A Place to Meet

About the time the Bangkok Urban Strategy was developing, a group out of Immanuel Baptist Church began a house church at Ratburana across the river in Thonburi. Judson Lennon counseled with them and encouraged them to use the BUS methods. They have incorporated some of its principles in their approach along with more traditional approaches, while the group is still small in number, it has won several handicapped persons to Christ through ministry to these people whom Thai society often shuts out.

Partly because of their traditional idea that a church must have a building from the start, Ratburana Chapel faces the dilemma. To have a group can finance a public place of worship. Most other house churches growing out of the strategy are going to face the same question eventually. Though still a small group, chapel members have borrowed money from the Baptist Church Loan Fund

made possible by the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. With difficulty the members are slowly managing to pay the money back.

Donald McCavran, dean emeritus of the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary, says that one of the big problems all over the world in starting churches in urban areas and getting them on their feet is the problem of a place to meet. Churches can start in homes, after the New Testament pattern, but where do they go when they outgrow the living room? In Singapore, for example, one of the new urban strategy churches which was started in a high-rise apartment building was facing in 1980 the problem of a congregation overflowing its meeting place. Property in Singapore is so scarce and expensive that even a large congregation would find it almost impossible to buy land and build. One possibility explored was buying an apartment and, if authorities approved, making it into a worship hall. This has been successful in Hong Kong.

To their advantage the congregation at Ratburana has managed to secure a ground-level building as their meeting place, with the help of the church loan fund. It is not yet clear if this procedure will provide a part of the answer for a place to meet as groups proliferate.

Immanuel Baptist Church and BUS

Immanuel Baptist Church has been involved at several levels with the Bangkok Urban Strategy. The oldest Thai church growing out of Southern Baptist work in Bangkok, it is also the strongest. It is a "church for all seasons" with a multifaceted outreach. Its pastor, Boonkrong Pitakanon, has been a supporter of BUS almost from its inception; and although he has not found time to be involved personally in leading a neighborhood team, he has been willing for the church to be used as a base church for the program. Understanding how to "use" missionaries effectively, he has asked Bill Smith to be outreach director for the church and has supported Smith and Floyd Kendall in carrying out the BUS plan in three different neighborhoods. Along with many other programs Immanuel Church has developed to carry out its mission, Pastor Boonkrong sees the Urban Strategy as part of the way to implement his vision for reaching Bangkok for Christ. He knows church growth

principles and how people respond to the gospel in groups (that are similar in culture and interests. Also, as moderator of the Thailand Baptist Churches Association and vice-president of the Thailand Baptist Convention, he is able to provide a positive influence for the program.

Immanuel Baptist Church has a solid base of 150 members and several capable leaders. Increasing financial support in recent years has enabled them to undergird a growing program of outreach. Pastor Boonkrong says, "I'm not worried about money to do God's work in Thailand. God's people have the money. It will come."

Having begun in close association with the Baptist Student Center, Immanuel Church has always had a large number of university students in its membership. In recent years, as young people have married and established families, most of them have taken their place among the active membership of the church. Having passed its twenty-fifth anniversary, the church continues to attract many university students. Now the congregation includes young families with their children, middle-aged couples, and even some older people—parents won by their children. Through patient persistence it has "grown up" a strong membership from a student beginning.

In Bangkok, as in many Southeast Asian countries, students and young adults tend to respond to the gospel of Christ more readily than older adults. This is one reason there is such an urgency about reaching that half of Bangkok's population under 20 years of age before they pass out of the responsive stage. Yet, though student work is so crucial, this responsiveness of young people poses a problem for churches when the young people finish school, get jobs, marry and settle down. The dropout rate for these young married couples is extremely high.

When a group of young couples who are active church leaders were asked at the Malaysia Baptist Convention in 1975 what had kept them faithful to their church, some interesting insights emerged. They could not say what had kept them faithful other than God's grace, but they could certainly understand why so many of their young Christian friends dropped out of church. For one thing, their early Christian life had been centered at the church. Sometimes they attended something at the church every day. Now that they had jobs and family responsibilities, such a church life was

impossible; and they felt guilty about being such "poor Christians." Since the average church life was still geared to furnishing a second home for young Christians, it increased their feeling of guilt.

Another reason for dropout was the church program that did not meet the needs of young couples struggling with rearing a family. It was geared either to the student age or to older adults. And a third reason was the demands made on the new family by parents on both sides. Chinese parents expected adult children to continue to live with them, or, if they move out, to make frequent and extended visits "so the grandparents can see the grandchildren." With all these pressures and the lack of provision for them in the church program, it is no wonder that so many Christian couples fall away from the church.

Many of Immanuel's members have the same Chinese background as the young Malaysian couples who were not the study. Pastor Boonkrong sees as one answer promoting home Bible studies or "cell groups" in the homes of these couples, thus using them rather than losing them. Several such cell groups begun toward the

Missionary Judson Tenison and members of a Bangkok Urban Strategy team on their way to visit in a community



end of 1980 gave promise of being the basis of BUS neighborhood groups. Could this be the answer to the search by Chanin and his wife, Rachanee, for away to touch their community? (See Chapter 3.)

A brief description of ministries Immanuel Baptist Church already had before the program of urban planning and continues to sponsor should give a picture of the kind of witness to the community this church has been. A strong day-care and kindergarten program with a staff of 12 has aided families in the area. For the many mothers working long hours at jobs away from home, the center is a dependable place to leave their children. In the process, the children are taught about the love of God, and through special programs the parents hear the gospel. As a special bonus, the self-supporting day-care center provides a corps of workers for the church's outreach because all of them are active Christians; some are girls who have graduated from the seminary. Another ministry the church has developed is a halfway house for juvenile offenders who are not ready to return to their homes after their detention (sometimes the home situation has problems that make it unwise for them to return). Pairote, a member of the church who is a graduate in social work, lives in the house and directs its work. Already several of the young men have become Christians and are rebuilding their lives.

When Immanuel Church voted to enter the Bangkok Urban Strategy, members began with a survey of the six-by-four block area where the church is located in downtown Bangkok. Missionary Bill Smith led in this and in the process developed principles and procedures for surveying a neighborhood that have since been used all over Bangkok and taught in the conference on urban evangelism in Manila in 1978. This survey revealed that not far from the church were Indians selling eyeglasses, Chinese selling jewelry to tourists, and hawkers for an international-class hotel, all in need of English lessons. Thai country girls working in neighborhood sweatshops needed to upgrade their sewing skills lest they drift into massage parlors for more money. There were also immigrants from upcountry in a slum area near the railroad tracks—no lack of people around the church who had needs to which caring Christians could minister.

The church launched the BUS program in the community along

the railroad tracks and found immediate response to the gospel and to the varied ministries the team members projected. Invitations came to lead Bible studies in homes, and soon there were some open professions of faith. Unfortunately, at the height of the response the government ordered the whole community of squatters to move and the shacks to be razed. Before a worshipping group could develop, the community moved right out from under the team. One or two families did attend the church, but most seemed to feel out of place among the middle-class members. Still the church continued to keep contact with those who had responded."

The next community Immanuel's BUS teams entered was the slum community in Lumpini Park where park employees lived. Some people there had heard the gospel at mass rallies held by various evangelical groups in a large dance pavilion in the park. A BUS team was formed and began the strategy in the slum with Bill Smith as missionary enabler. A breakthrough came when they found a family with a young man in his early twenties with cancer. Visiting him in the hospital, they found God had opened his heart. He was soon led to faith in Christ. This opened a home for a Bible study, which later became a regular worshipping group. After a remission of his cancer, this young man attended the seminary for one year.

One of Immanuel's most exciting new beginnings was among ethnic Khmers (Cambodians). Not refugees but long-term residents and citizens of northeast Thailand, they had migrated to Bangkok in search of work. On the church nursery school staff were two Khmer-speaking girls who were recent graduates of the Thailand Baptist Theological Seminary. They made friends with a Khmer woman who was active in finding jobs for newly arrived Khmers. The Lord opened her heart, and soon she was telling the Khmers about her new-found faith in Christ. The three women started a Thursday night fellowship and Bible study in the Khmer language at the church. In an atmosphere of warmth and acceptance, attendance reached 20 almost immediately. The people not only received the latest gossip from Surin but heard stirring news about a new way of life in Jesus Christ.

With a survey indicating that a large percentage of these Khmers (some 20,000 as estimated by Bill Smith) were working on nearby



1. JUA...WtMHMB-AAA-UtFUIfoAKBIWit JUA... JUMJUH-H.^Joumi
 Missionary Floyd Kendall teaching a group at Immanuel Baptist Church in Bangkok

construction sites, a Sunday School class was started. Many of the Thursday night group began to attend it and the Sunday morning worship (they also understood the Thai language). Several have come to know Christ. Two years later a small Thursday night group was continuing to meet at the base church, and several of those attending were taking a leadership role in the BUS team at Huay Kwang (see below).

In the meantime Pastor Boonkrong and Smith have gone with some of the new Christians to share their faith in their home villages. With hope of seeing work begun in these villages someday, members of Immanuel's Khmer group are continuing trips to their former homes, where response is encouraging.

In 1980 the Thailand Baptist Mission requested from the Foreign Mission Board two new missionary couples to learn Cambodian. They were to begin work on an urgent basis among more than 200,000 Cambodian refugees living in camps in Thailand, but the long-range prospect is that they will plant churches among all

Cambodian-speaking people in the country, both the original one million permanent residents and the present refugee population. The latter could become semipermanent residents in their camps or could become missionaries back in Cambodia if the Thai government and the United Nations decide they must return there.

Already over ten thousand Khmer refugees have turned to Christ in an indigenous movement in the largest refugee camp at Khao I Dang. Hundreds have believed in other camps, and in early 1981 some 30 to 50 were being baptized each Sunday in the two camps where Southern Baptists share responsibility for medical and other services. Since 1975 Southern Baptist missionaries and Khmer leaders have baptized over three thousand Khmers in camps in the Chanthaburi-Trat area. Most of these have moved on to other countries for resettlement, but most of the present wave of Khmers will not be sent to other countries. The Danny Hill family has been assigned to enter Cambodian work after completing Thai and Cambodian language study. If Cambodia itself ever opens again to missionary work, trained personnel will be ready to go.

In the latter part of 1980, a team from Immanuel Church surveyed another community near the Makkasan railroad station, on the edge of the Huay Kwang District. Missionaries Floyd and Jean Kendall, who have moved into a missionary house purchased to enable them to be near this and other work, became the missionary enablers. To furnish a base in the neighborhood for the outreach, two members of the church, Thanin and his wife, Chanchai, moved into the slum, with the church paying their rent. Their home has become the meeting place for the new worshipping group; and since Chanchai herself **IS** Khmer, the group has already attracted four other Cambodian-Speaking people from the Northeast. Several of the Khmer members of Immanuel are working on the Huay Kwang team. If the worship service picks up momentum, it could become the center of the Khmer work rather than the Thursday night group at the church and possibly become a branch of Immanuel Church or a separate daughter church. Rung, a brother of some Khmer members, came from the Northeast to enter the seminary in 1900 and is gaining valuable experience working in the BUS strategy. Perhaps he will furnish leadership for the Khmer work, including leading the effort to reach back into the home villages in Buriram Province.

onchai, co-director of the
ptist Student Center



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⁴ⁱ "Gradually Still Bad"

Thai people have an interesting expression they use when they have been sick and friends inquire how they are feeling. They answer, "*khoy yang chuc*" which interpreted loosely means "getting better," but when literally translated means "gradually still bad." It ^{is}, all in all, an encouraging word: hopeful but realistic. The idea seems to be "I'm gradually getting better, but don't stop feeling sorry for me because (need your sympathy)." The author suspects that it has the force of a phrase he used to hear in western North Carolina in answer to an inquiry about one's health. If one was not in the best of health but able to be up and going, (he reply might be "Jus' tolerable" or "Tolerably well." It seemed to mean, "I can barely tolerate it, but I don't want you to feel too bad. Just don't stop feeling sorry for me."

"Gradually still bad" describes fairly accurately the situation in Thailand today—both geopolitical and spiritual. Many things are encouraging and give one hope. Yet realistically there is much that is "still bad." There are still overwhelming needs and challenges. So much remains to be done that it seems we have barely made a dent in the task.

"How are things in Thailand?" The questioner has a worried look and often quotes from a newspaper article about the latest incident

In Thailand's border. One hears the same question in neighboring Malaysia or the Philippines as often as in the United States. How are things in Thailand? The answer: not nearly as bad as they could be. Thailand has advantages that the other states of Indochina did not have, not least of which is a long history of independence and a fierce determination to remain free from foreign domination. Thailand, "land of the free," has never been colonized by any European or Asian power, and the Thai mean to keep it that way. Another powerful plus is a strong monarchy and the people's love for the king. Still another is a strong economy based primarily on agriculture and some of the most fertile land anywhere. One of the few countries in Asia with a food surplus to export, Thailand also has mineral resources, including a recent discovery of abundant gas in the Gulf of Thailand, and an expanding industrial base.

On the other hand, there are factors that cause concern. Denis Cray raises a serious question in the lead sentence of his article "Woes at Home in Thailand" in the *New Sunday Times* of Malaysia in August 1980: "Can Thailand—the front-line State of noncommunist South-east Asia—withstand mounting pressure from an Indochina dominated by the tough, war-hardened veterans of Hanoi?"

Cray indicates that many Thai leaders are worried more about internal weakness than external threats, quoting one who spoke of an "outdated, clique-ridden political set-up, a home-grown communist insurgency, glaring economic gaps between the urban rich and the rural poor, and a rapid break-down of traditional values."

The article points up another concern. Because Thailand has never been **colonized**—never had a revolution—there is a complacency, the *maïen rat* ("never mind, we'll muddle through") attitude. "This may be a pleasant approach to life, but in these days it is a dangerous one," a government official is quoted as warning.

A saying of the Thai people comes from their first great king, Ramkamhaeng. "There's fish in the water, rice in the fields." There has been an abundance of food for everyone to eat, but the population was over forty-six million in 1980 and is expected to reach seventy-five million by 2000. Thailand, like most countries, is having to face the limits of natural resources.

In the same article Cray quotes Thongbai Thongpao, Thailand's

top civil rights lawyer, who advises against the Thai belief that knowing how to take care of oneself is the highest good. He maintains this attitude cannot work in a modernizing society. "It leads to greed and corruption," the lawyer stresses. Cray says many educated Thais are concerned about preoccupation with personal gain.

Thai Christians pray that Thailand will not have to go through the tribulation of living under a communist regime. Scarcely a meeting of any kind closes without prayer to that end. But the threat of what happened in Laos and Cambodia is real. Thai Christians know from the Bible and from history that great suffering can come on any people and that even when it comes, God can bring blessing out of it. They understand that the greatest blessing of all is a tender and responsive heart toward God. However, the prayer of God's people in Thailand is "O Lord, deliver us from communism. Help us to learn to love and obey you without having to suffer that."

Thai Christians are deeply grateful for the complete *freedom* of religion they enjoy. Though the state religion is Buddhism, the king is the protector of all faiths, and the constitution guarantees every citizen the right to believe in and practice any religion he chooses. In a land as free and open religiously as anywhere on earth, Christians proclaim their faith on the streets, on radio, on television, and through the printed page. They pray fervently that God will keep that precious privilege for them.

Just as things are "gradually improving but still bad" in Thailand's political situation, the same can be said about the outlook for the church of Jesus Christ. Prospects have never been so encouraging, and yet the task *remaining* is so great as to seem impossible. Like Paul, Thailand Christians can say: "A great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:9).

Evidence that there are open doors to Thai people may be seen in record Scripture distribution for the past few years. The Bible has been the best seller in Buddhist Thailand since 1970. In 1978, 13 million portions of the Scriptures were distributed in Thailand and in 1979, 17 million. Year after year Thai people have shown their interest in the message of the Bible. Although many of these portions are distributed free, large numbers of them are sold at subsidized prices, so that the buyer is making some personal investment.



Bangkok Urban Strategy team leader Iris

A recent scientific audience survey showed that 33 percent of the people in Bangkok had read some part of the Bible and another 28 percent said they had seen it. Only 37 percent said they did not know it. We have come a long way since the first missionaries to Thailand in 1828 brought with them copies of the Gospel of Matthew translated into the Siamese language by Ann Judson in Burma and printed on Carey's press in Serampore. The Word of God in the hands and hearts of so many Thais gives the Holy Spirit powerful truth to work on in preparing them to respond.

Something else is "gradually getting better." Christian leaders are encouraged by the accelerated rate of church growth. Thailand has historically been known as having a discouragingly slow rate of growth in the number of Christians, one of the slowest in the world, outside Muslim lands. The 1979 report from the Religious Affairs Department of the Thai Government revealing Christians at .6 percent of the population demonstrates a dramatic increase from the .1 percent in 1952.

Most encouraging of all—that is "gradually getting better" is a fact uncovered by Alex Smith, of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship.

Smith discovered that in the previous five years (1974-1979), church membership had increased 35 percent, the number of churches 40 percent, and the number of full-time Christian workers 33 percent. Acharn Boonkrong's confidence that Thai hearts are more open than ever before, reported in Chapter 2, finds support in solid figures.

Some facts indicate that the Christian movement is growing faster in Bangkok than in the rest of the country. The Religious Affairs Department of the Thai Government report states that 1.5 percent of Bangkok's population are Christians, more than twice the national percentage. That would mean that out of five million, there would be 55,825 Catholics and 16,675 Protestants. Churches have certainly increased in Bangkok. Fourteen Protestant churches when this author came to Bangkok in 1952 grew to 93 in 1980.

As a part of the research for the Bangkok Urban Strategy and for a proposed All-Media Penetration of Bangkok to reinforce BUS, an audience research project was carried out in 1978 and 1979. Its purpose was to gain reliable information on Bangkok residents as to felt needs, awareness and understanding of the Christian message, and attitudes toward Christianity and Christians.

The results of the study revealed a surprising penetration of the gospel among Bangkokians. Many among the researchers had wondered if there was enough understanding of the Christian message to register. However, fully 31 percent answered correctly that God is the creator of all things, while 45 percent still said they thought there is no god, the orthodox Buddhist position. Nineteen percent answered that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, not a "man like the rest of us" or "a religious teacher." Fully 59 percent of those polled said that the Bible is the "Word of God." They could have answered "religious precepts" or "Buddhist scriptures." This certainly does not mean that they revere the Bible and take it seriously as the Word of God, but the answer does mean that they know Christians call the Bible the Word of God. In fact, a remarkable 10 percent of the respondents were able to answer *all* the 20 questions about Christian beliefs correctly. If the sample truly represents Bangkok's population, approximately 500,000 people are at what Viggo Soerenga, Christian research consultant who designed the survey, calls the "reaping state." This means that they have enough

understanding to respond intelligently to the gospel and must have listened with some interest to retain this much of Christian truth. What an incentive for Christians to get out and witness with confidence in Bangkok!

Even more significant for a strategy to win Bangkok people to Christ is the fact that the common man has a better understanding of the gospel than the upper classes. Sogaard says in the report: "It is clear that it is the lower educated groups—working class—where the gospel penetration is most evident, and which has more depth of understanding. We find that 21 percent are at final stage (positive response to the gospel), while only 8 percent of students are at that stage. In other words, a good proportion of the lower educated groups seem to have the basic understanding and knowledge required to respond intelligently to persuasive communication, calling for decisions. ... It seems that Christianity has penetrated much further among the working class." Forty-six percent of the less educated saw God as creator of all things, opposed to only 20 percent of the students. Only 22 percent of the working class think there is no god, compared to 68 percent of the students. It would seem that Christians in Bangkok ought to take seriously Jesus' command to preach the gospel to the poor.

Not only do Bangkok's people understand Christian teaching to a surprising degree but also they are open to change. Their main concern is for the future safety of the country. Almost 80 percent agreed with the statement: "I am concerned about the future safety of my country." Apparently the insecurity caused by surrounding upheavals has had a profound effect on the people of Thailand.

At the same time, people of Bangkok have a very positive attitude toward Christians. The word Christian is now pretty well understood. Eighteen percent said Christians were "the disciples of Jesus," and 69 percent saw them as "those who follow the Christian religion." When asked how they felt about Christians in Thailand, 41 percent answered that they were "good and important," while only 9 percent said they were not important. Others said they did not know any Christians. Most people saw Christians as worth looking up to, useful, loving their neighbors, joyful, and good people to have as friends. Though Thai Christians are sometimes accused of "selling their country" by deserting the national reli-

gion, an overwhelming majority of the respondents polled said Christians love their nation. On the crucial question of whether they themselves would consider becoming Christian, an astonishing 70 percent replied that they would consider becoming Christians providing the right conditions prevail. I will "if I see it useful to my life." Thai people want to see measurable results.

Another answer to becoming a Christian: "I will if somebody explains it so I can understand." Even the Ethiopian eunuch asked for the same. Fair enough. A high total of 68 percent of the total sample had been exposed to a Christian testimony of some sort, but just over a third of them said that they did not understand. Interestingly, a closer study made of those who said they did not understand showed these people had a higher level of understanding than others. Perhaps these represent true inquirers, because those who state they do not understand seem to understand best who Jesus is. They are waiting for more explanation.

Wan Petchsongkram did not seem to be seeking at first. Born in the southern province of Songkhla, he spent most of his adolescence and youth seeking for peace in Buddhism. For nine years he was a novice and then a Buddhist monk, studying Buddhism intensively until he had reached the highest level open to him at his age and had passed the difficult national examinations, qualifying him as a teacher. He says, "When I got to the heart of Buddhism, there was an empty space, a vacuum. Buddhism taught that I had to cease to desire, to feel, to be. I would not accept that this was all." He left the monkhood, later acquired a family, and found himself in Bangkok.

Coming in contact with a group of Christians at Thonburi Baptist Chapel and with missionaries Harold and Rose Reeves, Wan was won first by the love and warmth of the group. "At first I didn't understand their teaching about Jesus Christ," he says. "I even fought against it. I was impressed, though, by how they loved me. It reminded me of the only person who had cared for me as I grew up, a Catholic priest in a school I attended a short while. These Christians cared about other people."

It was not until he entered the Thailand Baptist Theological Seminary, not until his second or third year, in fact, that he came to understand who Jesus is. "When I really understood who Jesus was

and what he had done for me," Wan said^ "I saw that he fitted exactly into that empty place in my heart."

Pastor Wan has become one of the most sought-after and effective preachers in Thailand. Few preachers in any language can equal him in unfolding what it means to have "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). Certainly he has few, if any, peers in presenting the claims and the meaning of Christ to Thai Buddhists who are seeking as he was. He has shared his insights about explaining the gospel to the Thai in his book *Talk in the Shade of the Bo Tree*. He is himself a living proof that Thai people are seeking and are finding their answers today in Jesus, and his ministry continues to produce additional proof, with hundreds being won through his preaching. His church, Rom Klao fojtftj Church, a new congregation in Bangkok, benefits from his teaching ministry.

"Gradually still bad!" Gradually the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ has begun to dawn on Bangkok after 150 years of evangelical witness. That extremely gradual pace has picked up momentum, at least a little bit, in the last five to ten years. Baptists now have begun to have a vision of reaching Bangkok and a strategy for doing it, whatever dislocation and upheaval come through economic and political events.

However, the sheer magnitude of the unfinished task is forbidding. The challenge is overwhelming. As we look at the unfinished task, there are some pressing and specific needs if Baptists, and all the people of God, are going to make a significant impact on Bangkok.

Meeting the Challenge

1 • y^e need an outpouring of the Holy spirit'^ power. At Pentecost the work of Christ was unfinished. Three years of intensive discipleship had been completed, and the trained corps of workers was available. Events had gathered into one focal point a "fullness of time." God's action in history and the witness of his people had produced responsive peoples among the Jews and the Gentiles. But one essential ingredient was missing: the present power of the Holy Spirit of God. Then at Pentecost Jesus, having been made Lord, poured out the promised Holy spirit on his church. The result was an explosion of evangelism that, in the face of opposition and even



A Bangkok Urban Strategy team at work

persecution, swept out in ever-widening circles to the limits of the Roman world.

Bangkok needs such an outpouring today. There is a worldwide fellowship of prayer that is praying for just such a breakthrough in Thailand. Within the country, Christians are giving themselves to prayer as never before. Days of prayer and fasting have become features of Thai church life. Friends of Christians in Thailand are concerned because international events have made Thailand a front-line country between radically different political systems. So there is urgency in their praying. The Consultation on World Evangelization brought evangelical leaders from 88 countries to Thailand in June 1980. Meeting for the first time for such a conference in a Third World country, these leaders sensed the deep spiritual needs of the Thai people and pledged themselves to pray for an outpouring of God's blessing on this land.

Cannot the vast prayer potential of Southern Baptists be harnessed for this job? Many churches have said, "What can we do to make a difference on the mission fields?" Many Baptists write and say, "Tell us your specific needs so we can pray intelligently." *May God lay a burden of prayer for Thailand on the shoulders of Southern Baptists.* Satan is not going to give up easily. The victory won on the cross must be claimed specifically for Thailand in the name of Jesus.

2. *We need to multiply New Testament churches.* The testing stage of Bangkok Urban Strategy has resulted in new neighborhood groups but not yet in new churches. Such groups need to be multiplied, but we also need to make starts farther from base churches which can then grow into churches for new areas. Many of them can become new base churches, and the strategy can reach its goal of "infinitely reproducing churches." Some of the churches growing out of the strategy may remain house churches indefinitely. Others may grow strong enough to buy property and become *de facto* "churches" among occupational groups like taxi drivers or doctors but attached to some mother church. Some groups may even be in prisons or in leprosy hospitals.

Other churches may develop outside the patterns of BUS. Some may be started as storefront or shop-house churches, begun with methods not greatly different from old Baptist patterns. The mission

has discarded these methods, but some churches may want to reuse them. Some churches may be started by individuals with a vision, such as the Rom Klao Church mentioned earlier in the chapter. Baptists should welcome and encourage these various methods and the various kinds of churches resulting and not try to fit everything in a straitjacket of conformity.

One member of Immanuel Baptist Church, with the backing of the church in the beginning began a shop-house chapel which has since become Q[^]thania Church. Pastor Chalerm Sak and his wife, Saijai, were dedicated Christians with a strong sense of call to evangelism. He served for a time as evangelist for Immanuel Church. His zeal and strong biblical preaching attracted a core group of young people, and the church prospered. He has not been willing to call the church "Baptist," so Immanuel has discontinued its financial aid. However, it is a strong, independent church, and for that Baptists can rejoice and thank God. The development of independent, indigenous churches should not surprise us. David Barratt, in his book *Schism and Renewal in Africa*, reports on thousands of indigenous churches springing up in that continent's phenomenal sweep toward becoming predominantly Christian by the year 2000. He sees in these the African's declaration that "Christ belongs to Africa," and suggests (hat rather than fighting these indigenous churches, we should try to counsel them and nourish them toward Christian maturity.

3. *We need to develop multiple strategies.* This is closely related to the previous need. We need to move consciously toward many ways of starting churches and not become too wedded to one. Raymond Bakke of Northern Baptist Theological Seminary said at Pattaya that most successful urban churches had developed multiple strategies, not just one. Using the principles discovered in the BUS search, we need to develop creative ways to cooperate with groups of Christians or with Christian families who have moved into new areas and long to start a church.

Perhaps other strategies being used in Bangkok can be included in Baptists' total thrust. A group of Thai Christians, with support from some missionaries of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, have started four "new life houses." They rent a typical house in the target area and locate a basic team of well-disciplined members in the

house.-Many of their workers are university students or theological students at Bangkok Bible College. They have an intensive program of tract distribution and visitation in the neighborhood. A full-time young pastor projects a program of Bible study, intensive fellowship, and worship, with the members spending almost all day Sunday at the church. They have been able to start spiritually vibrant churches and grow mature church members.

Another strategy in use by two Assembly of God missions in Bangkok is the large central church strategy. All ministries are centered in and all resources are poured into one central church with the aim of making it the denomination's nucleus in the city. The goal is one super church which can become well known throughout the city. It then develops "cell groups" or home Bible studies all over the city as a means of outreach. Perhaps some of these can grow into new, independent congregations under the umbrella of the mother church. Mission resources are used to build a large church building and to subsidize the church through radio outreach, correspondence courses, literature, etc. The work is usually built around a gifted, charismatic pastor as a central leader. The large Yoido Island Full Gospel Central Church in Seoul, Korea, which in 1980 had over one hundred thousand members and seven thousand home groups, grew out of this pattern. In Bangkok, the Chai Samarn Church and the Ekamai Church are examples of this approach.

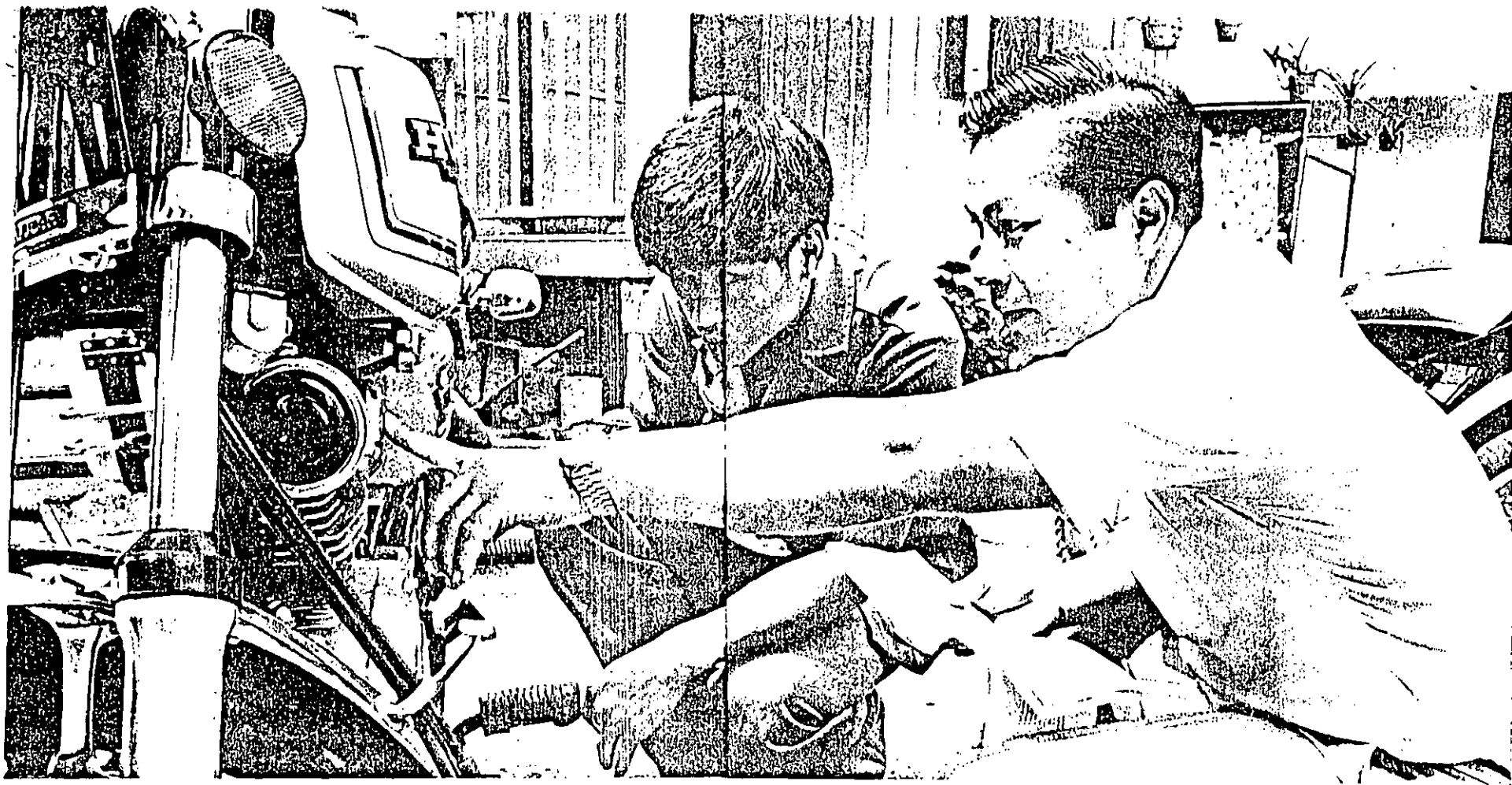
Baptists have taken a different path, choosing to develop several autonomous churches rather than a single large one. Baptists no longer subsidize churches either in buildings or budgets. This approach would require extremely heavy subsidy to one church, which would not be repeated for others. As it is, Immanuel Baptist Church and Grace Baptist Church are both serving something of the function of a strong "First Church." At any rate, Baptists are long past the beginning stages and probably will not use this strategy.

4. *We need to make a serious effort to "preach the gospel to the poor."* As already indicated, the audience research survey showed that the working classes are not only more responsive but actually have a better understanding of the gospel than professional people and students. Yet most of the people active in Baptist churches in Bangkok are middle-class people. This evidently means that mid-

dle-class missionaries reached middle-class people rather than that middle-class people are more responsive in Bangkok. Christian history shows that most great movements of people into the kingdom of God occurred among poor people, what has been true in work with refugees can be true of work in the slums. Refugee work has proved that evangelism and ministry in Christ's name to human need can be Siamese twins.

5. *We need to find a way to confront the whole city.* The thrust of Bangkok Urban Strategy—the principle of one-on-one witnessing and person-to-person discipling—is basic to a solid and lasting urban movement. But with so many millions and with the availability of mass media to Christians, is there not a way we can amplify outreaches of churches and neighborhood teams? The All-Media Penetration vision is based on this idea. Built on the "climatizing" principle of BUS, its goal is to penetrate the city of Bangkok with the gospel of Jesus Christ through all appropriate media channels. It is not visualized as an advertising campaign or an attempt to saturate the city with the gospel. Rather, through carefully selected media it aims at helping the Bangkok Urban Strategy in a step-by-step program to (1) catalyze the church, (2) climatize the city, (3) confront the interested, (4) contact the responsive, and (5) "church" the committed. In 1980 a carefully worked out plan was awaiting a qualified director to carry it out. We need to pray that God will show a way to accelerate reaching the masses for Christ through use of this All-Media Penetration plan or some other effective supporting use of the mass media.

6. *We need a way to involve all our constituency.* As the Bangkok Urban Strategy was completing its testing phase and moving into the implementing years of the 80s, only a small percentage of Baptists in Bangkok were involved. Perhaps God's work has always been done by Gideon's band. Yet how tragic when so little of so small a church base is mobilized. According to urban evangelists meeting at the Consultation on World Evangelization in Panaya in 1980, this is a universal problem: how to mobilize a lethargic church for evangelism. Pastors have great demands upon them, and many are resistant to change. Churches, especially those swimming in a sea of spiritual opposition, often do not have enough strength to reach out. They feel that they do well to hold their own and tend to



A Baptist layman, Prasam, teaching motorcycle maintenance to Tan in

turn inward. Missionaries are busy with already assigned duties and feel they do not have time for direct evangelism and church planting. How do we move away from "business as usual" and on to a wartime footing? How do we bend every resource—personnel, money, institutions, programs, time—to the overriding task of evangelism and church planting?

7. *We need to develop a new kind of leader.* If we are to make

evangelism and church planting our first priority, we are going to have to have new types of leaders. These will have to appear on two levels. First, we need a host of "laymen"—volunteer, nonpaid tentmakers. Only with a mobilizing of the whole people of God can we infiltrate and take the cities for Christ. And these Christians must be taught how to do the job. An ongoing, intensive, flexible, in-depth program of training individual Christians to function in

evangelism is essential to flooding a great city with churches. This program was begun by BUS in 1980 and already is beginning to produce such leaders.

Second, we need a seminary program for full-time Christian workers that teaches them how to start new churches, not just how to work in already established churches. Most seminaries in the Third World have copied rather closely Western patterns of theological education. These academic programs are being modified today even in countries with many established churches. Certainly in cities which have only a fraction of the churches they need, if ever/person is to have a fair chance to hear the gospel, training programs should be more missions and church-planting oriented. They should teach the student the "how to" of beginning the witness in a new place. The laborers for the harvest have not only to be prayed forth, but to be trained to plant and grow new churches if the great unreached cities are to know Christ"

Yes, things in Thailand are "gradually still bad." Not only is the need bad, but the task is totally impossible—impossible as far as human wisdom and strength are concerned. "Who is sufficient for these things?" Paul asked. Then he answered, "But our sufficiency is of God." Impossible, but God. . . .

Bangkok and Bold Mission Thrust

If Southern Baptists desire to make Bold Mission Thrust their drumbeat as they march toward the year A.D. 2000, they will have to hear also the measured tread of millions marching into the city. The city is not our only arena; but it is a major one for these final years of the century. The cities of Asia, focal points of vast populations in the earth's most populous continent, are the battlegrounds for winning the hearts and minds of the largest unreached segments of the human race. We must not neglect the evangelization of the villages, something the communists knew when they used the countryside to surround and conquer the cities. But we can never forget that Paul and the other apostles challenged the Roman Empire with love in the name of Christ by what was primarily an urban strategy. The answer must be a two-pronged attack. In between are the towns and small cities; a strategy for evangelizing them is essential too.

In this study Bangkok has been our focus. Baptists have a stake and a stewardship in this, the one great city of Thailand. In 1979 Southern Baptists had completed 30 years of work in Bangkok. As they look to the last 20 years of the century, some of the missionaries and some of their Thai fellow believers have a vision and a strategy for this great city. During the development of the strategy, Bill Beckham drew a picture of the future of Baptist work in Bangkok as it might look if God brings to fulfillment this vision and the implementation of the biblical principles expressed in this strategy. He wrote:

1. We will sense a New Testament atmosphere about what is happening. Among the churches, Christians, and missionaries in Bangkok there will be something alive and vital and dynamic taking place.

2. We will recognize this as a Thai strategy. Thais will be leading and working in all areas.

3. We will see Thai Christians intensively cultivating and climatizing several target neighborhoods through cassettes, films, tracts, books, billboards, and logos.

4. We will see Thai Christians ministering to lost Thais in previously climatized target neighborhoods through contact friendship ministries. . . . We will see Thais showing Thail Jesus cares and that Christians care.

5. We will see Thai Christians leaching a special Bible Study of 10 weeks which is geared toward bringing non-Christians to a decision. This Bible Study . . . will have been developed by Thais and written by a Thai.

fa. wu will see an ongoing discipleship **CUUIM- of** 10 weeks. This course will prepare new Christians with a "survival kit" and will prepare older Christians with a "renewal kit." We will see new Christians growing and maturing rapidly as they are given a solid base from which to face problems of being Christians in Thailand.

7. We will see special leadership training. This training will prepare Thais to climatize, form ministry groups, leach the special Bible Study, disciple, be leaders in small groups, serve as lemmaker pastors of small house churches.

8. We will see Thai churches alive and reaching out. . . . serving as base churches to assist house churches . . . including several